

States Focus



PUNJAB GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES HIGHEST-PAID IN COUNTRY: MANN

The employees of the Punjab Government are the highest-paid among all the Government servants in the country, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann claimed on Thursday.

"If the Centre pays ₹30,000 to ₹32,000 to an employee, the Punjab Government pays ₹50,000. It is a matter of immense pride and satisfaction that the state Government pays the highest salary to its employees, who are its backbone," Mann said here.

His statement came on a day when Punjab Government employees went on a statewide strike to press the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) regime to accept their demands, including releasing the pending dearness allowance.

More than 150 employees' bodies under the banner of Punjab Sanjha Mulazam Manch joined hands for the "maha hartal", with over three lakh employees joining the stir, affecting public services.



RAJASTHAN GOVT COMMITTED TO PROVIDING FACILITIES TO YOUTH: CM

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma described the youth as the country's biggest asset and said on Thursday that their patience, confidence and relentless efforts would be crucial to realising the vision of a developed India.

Addressing the 'My Bharat Khelo India' dialogue programme virtually – which Prime Minister Narendra Modi also addressed – Sharma said a positive environment for sports has been created in the country under Modi's leadership. He said talent from villages is now getting opportunities to compete on national and international platforms and the Government is committed to providing opportunities and facilities to youth.

The chief minister said the "double-engine" Government in Rajasthan was working continuously to take sports to new heights. "Players are being prepared for world-class competitions through better training, modern facilities, financial security and recognition," he said. Sharma said 50 Khelo India centres were established in Rajasthan, while Centres of Excellence for athletics, archery and boxing were being developed at Sawai Mansingh Stadium.

Bihar CM conducts aerial survey of flood-hit Nepal border areas



A view during an aerial survey being conducted by Bihar CM Samrat Choudhary, unseen, of the flood situation in border areas of Bagaha, Valmiki Nagar, Bettiah and Motihari following flash floods in neighbouring Nepal

FAIR REPORT
Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary on Thursday conducted an aerial survey of the flood-affected areas in the state that shares a border with Nepal, where devastating flash floods claimed the lives of at least 162 people and left many untraceable a day ago.

After the aerial inspection at Valmikinagar in West Champaran district, he said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was monitoring the situation.

Bihar was put on alert

as floodwaters from the neighbouring country entered the Gandak river and reached the Gandak barrage on Wednesday, prompting authorities to open all 36 gates to control the surge.

In a post on social media, Choudhary wrote, "In view of the floods in Nepal, I conducted an aerial survey of the flood situation in Bihar's border areas, including Bagaha, Valmikinagar, Bettiah, and Motihari. I also reviewed the administrative preparedness regarding the potential impact, necessary precautionary measures, safety, and relief and rescue operations."

He also directed the officials concerned to take all necessary steps with utmost promptness and preparedness.

Ensuring the safety of citizens in flood-affected areas and providing them with every possible assistance remains the highest priority of the state Government, Choudhary said.

Talking to reporters, the CM said, "With the blessings of the Almighty, things are returning to normalcy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is monitoring the situation. The

discharge of water from the Gandak barrage has started declining. Due to fresh rainfall, the water level in the Gandak river has increased slightly, but the discharge from the barrage is still around 1 lakh cusecs."

The water discharge from the Gandak barrage at Valmikinagar declined from 1.50 lakh cusecs at 11 pm on Wednesday to 1.04 lakh cusecs on Thursday morning. "The water discharge from the Gandak barrage at Valmikinagar peaked at 1.50 lakh cusecs at 11 pm on Wednesday, after which the water level began receding," said the Water Resources Department (WRD) in a statement on Thursday.

The water level of the Gandak river, which was in spate after the flash floods in Nepal a day ago, was showing a receding trend on Thursday, bringing respite to the residents of low-lying areas in northern parts of Bihar, officials said.

The Nepal Police said that the death toll rose to 162 in the flash floods on the Bhotekoshi river that wreaked havoc across three districts of the neighbouring country on Wednesday.

The flash floods were caused after an avalanche blocked the flow of the Lhende tributary of the Bhotekoshi river and first hit Timure, near Nepal's border with China, at Rasuwagadhi.

Many from Kolkata missing



FAIR REPORT
Kolkata

A pall of gloom, had descended in parts of Kolkata, Hooghly and other areas as more than 35 people including the 32-member group continued to remain on the missing list after a devastating flash-flood hit the Nepal-Tibet border.

The pilgrims from Kolkata had left Kolkata on August 21 for Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra.

According to sources in the travel agency the travellers were at Rasuwagadhi at around 8 in the morning when the flash floods hit. "Since then we have not been able to establish contact with the members of the group," that include two travel managers. About 133 Indians, many of whom were from Bengal went missing after the mishap.

11 from Gujarat missing



FAIR REPORT
Ahmedabad

Eleven persons from Gujarat remain missing in flood-hit Nepal, with authorities establishing contact with one woman who was earlier reported untraceable but was found to be safe later, officials said on Wednesday.

The Gujarat State Emergency Operations Centre (SEOC) had earlier received information that 12 persons from the state were missing following the devastating floods in Nepal. Relatives had called SEOC and district emergency centres to share information about the people who were untraceable after the flood.

West Bengal Govt probes 60 infant deaths in three weeks

FAIR REPORT
Kolkata

The West Bengal Government has demanded detailed information on reported deaths of at least 60 infants in the first three weeks of August including 10 in a single day in Malda district of North Bengal.

The reports have been sought from the Malda Medical College and Hospital (MMCH) where most of the deaths occurred, Health Department sources said adding private nursing homes too have been asked to be scrutinized for any deaths in the corresponding period.

MMCH doctors said that the

deaths had occurred because of a number of reasons adding a number of deaths had been "referral cases" sent from the block level centres.

Speaking on condition of anonymity one of staff said that a preliminary report had already been sent by the Medical Superintendent adding, 16 other hospitals had also been investigated.

Bengal Health Minister Saradwath Mukherjee had been regularly visiting the hospitals including conducting surprise checks, sources said. Meanwhile, in a parallel development the Health Department had



questioned several fourth-year students of two prominent medical colleges regarding reports of an interstate blood smuggling selling racket.

Three lab technicians had also been questioned from Panskura in West Midnapore district.

Recent investigations had unmasked a blood-smuggling racket that involved selling blood from local Government hospitals to private entities and individual buyers outside Bengal.

The states where the bloods were smuggled out included Bihar, Jharkhand and even Mumbai, sources said.

Coast Guard brings 2 Chinese survivors of sunken cargo ship to Odisha, search on for missing crew

FAIR REPORT
New Delhi

Indian Coast Guard ship Varad, deployed for a search and rescue operation after a Panama-flagged bulk carrier sank in the Bay of Bengal nearly a week ago, safely brought two Chinese survivors to Odisha's Paradip on Thursday, an official said.

The merchant vessel MV Ocean Winner, carrying 24 crew members – 20 Chinese, three Myanmar and one Bangladeshi – was heading to Singapore when it sank about 240 nautical miles from the Paradip coast on August 22.

The Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Sri Vijaya Puram immediately diverted MT Aisopos, a commercial vessel that was in the vicinity, to "search for the vessel or liferafts and render assistance".



Two survivors were rescued that night.

"Indian Coast Guard ship Varad safely brought two Chinese survivors – Pan Tonglai and Chen Jianhe – to Paradip today. Rescued from a liferaft on August 22, both received medical care onboard during transit and have now been handed over to authorised company representatives in the presence

of Bureau of Immigration and local police officials," an ICG spokesperson said.

He said coordinated sea and air search operations are underway to locate the missing crew members.

MRCC, Sri Vijaya Puram, is continuously coordinating with all participating assets in the ongoing rescue efforts, the spokesperson added.

On Tuesday, the ICG said

the search and rescue efforts for the missing crew members were being "further augmented in coordination with the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, Beijing".

Additional Coast Guard assets and merchant vessels were being deployed and coordinated to intensify the search operation, the official had said.

On August 22, the ICG deployed three of its ships for the search and rescue operation. ICG ships Varad and Anmol were deployed for the rescue efforts, while Vijit was deployed from Sri Vijaya Puram to augment the operation. MV Ocean Winner's last port of call was Paradip, and its next port of call was Singapore, the spokesperson said.

The ship was carrying iron ore from Odisha, officials had said earlier.

Sri Lankan Navy commander holds talks with Indian Navy chief, Defence Secretary

FAIR REPORT
New Delhi

The Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, Vice Admiral Damian Fernando, held talks with Navy Chief Admiral Krishna Swaminathan and Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, aiming to bolster maritime security cooperation and enhance training synergy between the two navies, officials said on Thursday.

Vice Admiral Fernando is on an official visit to India from August 26-29, and the visit is aimed at further strengthening bilateral maritime cooperation and enhancing navy-to-navy engagements between India and Sri Lanka.

V Adm Fernando assumed office as the 27th Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy on July 1. This is his first official visit

abroad, they said. He was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour at the South Block lawn. He also paid homage to the fallen soldiers by laying a wreath at the National War Memorial on Thursday.

"He also held discussions with Navy Chief Admiral Krishna Swaminathan on furthering bilateral maritime cooperation, including joint operations, capacity building, training and measures related to maritime security," a spokesperson of the Indian Navy said. As part of the visit, V Adm Fernando will travel to Kochi to visit Indian naval training establishments and headquarters of the Southern Naval Command, with a focus on enhancing training linkages and professional exchanges between the two navies, the official said.

The Sri Lanka Navy is an important and longstanding



Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh during a meeting with Sri Lankan Navy Commander Vice Admiral Damian Fernando in New Delhi

ing maritime partner of the Indian Navy. "The visit of V Adm Damian Fernando is expected to further consolidate the longstanding and multifaceted navy-to-navy

relationship between India and Sri Lanka, contributing to enhanced maritime cooperation and greater stability in the Indian Ocean Region," he added.

BJP cites Jhooth Ki Goonj website to accuse Rahul Gandhi of misleading youth

FAIR REPORT
New Delhi

The BJP on Thursday cited a website, which claims to fact-check Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's statements during his 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' campaign, to accuse him of misleading the youth and said his "falsehoods" will now be answered with facts.

The party fielded a battery of its spokespersons to launch an all-out attack against Gandhi, saying his utterances are driven by "frustration and envy" towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi. They also described the website – titled 'Jhooth Ki Goonj' – as a "nemesis" to Gandhi's cam-

paign and shared its link on their posts on social media.

BJP MP and national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said Gandhi is the "flag-bearer of lies" and alleged that his statements are fuelled by frustration and envy towards Modi.

"No matter how much Rahul Gandhi, the flag-bearer of lies fueled by frustration and envy towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, continues to spread falsehoods, every lie is now being exposed through facts. The Jhooth Ki Goonj website is one by one exposing the reality of Gandhi's claims," Trivedi said in his post.

Party national media head

and chief spokesperson Anil Baluni said Gandhi's claims will now be countered with facts. "Let Rahul Gandhi keep on lying, no problem... now every lie will be answered with facts. The faster the propaganda will echo, the louder the truth will emerge in response," Baluni said.

Its national media co-charge and spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari said the youth have launched the website in response to Gandhi's "fake narrative".

"Tired by Rahul Gandhi's fake narrative, youth have launched the website. Slowly, youth are busting the propaganda of the Congress and its proxies," he said. Later,



addressing a press conference, Bhandari alleged that the country's youth are "troubled, irritated and angry" with Gandhi's lies. "You know, the youth of the country is so irritated and angry with the series of lies Rahul Gandhi is

spreading, that today the country's youth have launched Jhooth Ki Goonj. For all the lies Rahul Gandhi has told, in parallel to that – this I saw on the internet, some youth sent it to me – the youth of this country has

launched 'Rahul Gandhi's Jhooth Ki Goonj,'" he told reporters. Bhandari said Gandhi had made 40 claims in his last four programmes and the youth are saying all 40 are either lies or misleading.

"This makes it clear that the real youth of the country, the youth who is on the ground, who is India's youth, not the Congress PR stunt one, the real youth of India is talking about 'Jhooth Ki Goonj,'" he claimed. BJP national spokesperson Prem Shukla said the website is exposing Gandhi's claims one by one.

"Rahul Gandhi's lies answered with facts. The 'Jhooth Ki Goonj' website is exposing each and every

claim of Rahul Gandhi one by one. The name is spot-on too: Jhooth Ki Goonj," Shukla claimed. Another BJP spokesperson Pratyush Kanth said the website is examining Gandhi's claims using documented facts and sources.

"Rahul Gandhi may continue to spread his narrative, but now every claim will be met with facts and evidence. 'Jhooth Ki Goonj' is systematically examining Rahul Gandhi's claims and exposing them, one by one, with documented facts and sources," Kanth said.

Senior Supreme Court lawyer Mahesh Jethmalani also joined the BJP leaders in criticising Gandhi saying

his 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' has met its "nemesis" in 'Jhooth Ki Goonj'.

"Rahul Gandhi's 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' finally has met its nemesis... From a GenZ," he said. Jethmalani claimed that the website examined 40 claims made by Gandhi during four rallies using 134 sources, with 29 rated "false" and 11 "misleading".

The website claims to fact-check statements made by Gandhi during his 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' events. It examines claims on issues including employment, NEET-related expenditure and crimes against women, and provides sources and evidence alongside them.

In a first, CM Vijay sits with ministers in TN Assembly

FAIR REPORT
 ■ Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay on Thursday made heads turn in the state Assembly when he casually moved from his chair in the House and sat besides ministers in the front row, marking a major departure from a long-standing tradition vis-a-vis seating.

Normally, the chief minister occupies a separate and spacious chair close to the Speaker's Chair and the ministers are seated separately, next to him/her, as per their seniority, in the front row.

The facing row is occupied by the Leader of the Opposition and leaders of the Legislature parties based on their numerical strength in the 234-member House with their respective party members behind.



In the afternoon session, Vijay casually moved from his chair, located on the right side of Speaker JCD Prabhakar and sat between Ministers K A Sengottaiyan (also Leader of the House) and Aadhav Arjuna.

According to a source, in the past no chief minister sat on the seat meant for ministers. Normally, the ministers or legislators change their positions for a brief

while to speak with their colleagues. But this perhaps is the first time a chief minister has shifted from his official chair to have a word with his colleagues.

Earlier in the day, Leader of the Opposition Udhayanidhi Stalin pointed out that the department secretaries should be asked to be present in the House when important issues are raised in the House by the members.

"The Speaker mentioned that then chief minister spoke about the Karur (stampede) incident during the previous DMK regime. Then our leader and CM (MK Stalin) was present in the House and so were the chief secretary and department secretaries. Now, both the chief minister and department secretaries are not present in the House," Udhayanidhi said.

Responding, Aadhav Arjuna said the secretaries were present in the adjoining "war room" and taking notes from the members' speeches.

The Speaker concurred with Udhayanidhi and said the senior officials will be asked to be present in the House during Assembly sessions. The CM had attended certain Government events earlier in the day, and had turned up for the session later.

Won't join Omar Govt until Statehood restored: J&K Congress chief Karra

FAIR REPORT
 ■ Jammu

Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) President Tariq Hameed Karra on Thursday once again rejected the ruling National Conference's invitation to join the Omar Abdullah-led Government, saying the Congress will not accept any ministerial berth until full statehood is restored to the Union Territory.

He also said the party would continue its political struggle to restore statehood and would not compromise its stand on positions in the Government.

Addressing a party gathering in Reasi, Karra said the Congress had maintained a consistent position that it would not accept ministerial berths while Jammu and Kashmir continues to remain a Union Territory.

The ruling National



Conference (NC) had approached the Congress on Wednesday with an offer to join the Council of Ministers ahead of a proposed expansion and reshuffle of the Omar Abdullah-led Government.

Karra had confirmed that the matter was under consideration, but the party has now reiterated that statehood is a precondition for entering the Cabinet.

The Congress, however, continues to support the

FAIR REPORT om outside. Karra has previously clarified that remaining outside the Cabinet does not mean withdrawing support to the elected Government and that the party would stand with it whenever it faces political challenges.

The Congress has supported the NC-led Government since October 2024 without taking office. In July, the Congress party had also participated in the National

Conference-led protest near Jantar Mantar in New Delhi in support of restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

The rift between the parties deepened at the time of the Government formation in October 2024. The NC offered one ministerial berth; the Congress sought two.

The Congress decided in 2024 not to join the Government; it said it would wait for J&K's statehood to be restored.

The trust deficit triggered a fresh war of words in October last year after the Congress accused its alliance partner of betrayal in Rajya Sabha seat-sharing. Ahead of the Rajya Sabha polls for the UT's four seats, the NC announced three candidates and offered the Congress the fourth, deemed unwinnable. The Congress said it had been assured a "safe seat", and decided not to contest.

Gujarat has not seen drought since Modi became CM in 2001: Shah

FAIR REPORT
 ■ Gandhiji Nagar

Union minister Amit Shah on Thursday stated that Gujarat's water management has improved significantly since Narendra Modi took office as chief minister in 2001. He further claimed that the state has not experienced drought conditions in the last 25 years.

Shah made these comments after inaugurating a 21-acre lake constructed by a trust headed by diamond businessman and Padma Shri recipient Savjibhai Dholakia in Dudhala village, Amreli district. Shah referred to the severe droughts of 1985, 1986, and 1987, and alleged that the Congress Government at the time was involved in corruption, including at the Rafaleswar cattle camp. He stated that measures to conserve rainwater and improve groundwater recharge were necessary to prevent future droughts.

"We were young then. People worked on drought relief, digging pits and filling them to earn daily wages. We distributed 250 grams of sukhdhi (a sweet) and old sandhals collected from homes to those suffering

from the drought," Shah said. He cited a public water tap near a bus stand in Rajkot that had to be lowered into a pit because the water pressure was too low to reach the surface.

"Such was the situation before Narendrabhai became chief minister in 2001," Shah said. He claimed that Modi's policies changed Saurashtra and north Gujarat from drought-prone areas to regions with better water supply.

According to Shah, the Modi Government constructed 150,000 check dams in 2003. Subsequent water conservation efforts included the Narmada canal network, SAUNI Yojana, and Sujalam. Shah stated that while the foundation stone for the Narmada project was laid by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, the project gates were opened only after Narendra Modi became prime minister.

Shah said that the Modi Government prioritised water management by establishing the Ministry of Jal Shakti after Modi assumed office as prime minister.

The Union minister also mentioned desilting of reservoirs, adoption of drip and



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the inauguration of 'Gujarat Gaurav Sarovar', on World Lake Day in Amreli, Gujarat

sprinkler irrigation, and the 'Catch the Rain' campaign as initiatives to enhance water conservation.

"After becoming Prime Minister, Narendra Modi established the Ministry of Jal Shakti. Everyone believed in the mantra of 'Water is life,' but previous Governments never established such a Ministry," said Shah.

Shah stated that Narmada water now reaches Saurashtra, Kutch, and Khavda, with surplus water being directed to reservoirs and rivers through the SAUNI Yojana.

According to Shah, approximately 10,000 lakes in north and central Gujarat have been filled with Narmada water. He added that water conservation efforts have

involved the Government, individuals, and local communities.

Shah noted that before 2001, Gujarat faced a significant geographical imbalance in water resources, with most water concentrated in Bharuch, even though the majority of the population resided elsewhere.

"Through human effort, public awareness and a mass movement, efforts were made to correct this imbalance," Shah said, adding that check dams, lakes and other water conservation structures had helped raise groundwater levels and boost agriculture.

Shah said that Dholakia has constructed 208 lakes, which have contributed to

groundwater recharge in the region.

Shah stated that, according to Dholakia, the 21-acre lake, measuring approximately 360 metres by 260 metres and four metres deep, has stored significant water and helped revive wells in the area.

Shah commended Dholakia for his work in water conservation. He stated that national civilian honours, including the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, and Bharat Ratna, are not intended for families or acquaintances.

"Despite building 208 lakes, Savjibhai said, 'I didn't even submit an application, and they awarded me the Padma Shri'. Savjibhai, after doing so much work for water conservation by building 208 lakes, if you had to apply for it, our Government would be considered blind," said Shah.

"Since Modi became the Chief Minister, Gujarat has not witnessed a single drought up to the year 2026. This time, everyone said a drought was imminent because of El Niño. Though there was less rainfall in some villages, the dire need to take cattle and migrate towards South Gujarat never arose.

Nations need resilient supply chains and rapid innovation to fight protracted conflicts: Rajnath

FAIR REPORT
 ■ Jabalpur

Nations with resilient supply chains, strong industrial capacity and ability to innovate rapidly would be better equipped to withstand prolonged conflicts, said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday in the backdrop of the more than four-year-old Russia-Ukraine war.

Against this backdrop, he said the Centre was committed to ensuring that India's armed forces were not dependent on foreign supply chains for critical defence requirements.

"Our aim is to manufacture defence equipment domestically, undertake repair and maintenance within the country, upgrade existing systems with modern technologies, and develop next-generation capabilities indigenously," Singh maintained.

He said these efforts reflected India's emergence as a global manufacturing hub, a reliable technology partner and a trusted defence partner. Singh made the remarks



Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh performs a ritual as Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav looks on during the 'Bhoomi Pujan' ceremony for the T-72 and T-90 Tank Overhaul Project at the Vehicle Factory in Jabalpur on Thursday

after laying the foundation stone of a ₹472-crore facility for the overhaul of T-series battle tanks at the 57-year-old Vehicle Factory Jabalpur (VFI).

Highlighting the changing nature of warfare, he noted countries possessing advanced technologies, resilient supply chains, robust industrial capabilities and dynamic innovation ecosystems would be in a stronger position to sustain themselves during long-drawn conflicts.

Singh said the T-series tank overhaul facility would help build a resilient domestic supply chain by generating demand for a wide

range of mechanical, electrical, electronic and hydraulic components, assemblies and subsystems.

"The sourcing of these items would create opportunities for local MSMEs in manufacturing and ancillary services associated with tank overhauling, while helping develop a strong and self-sustaining industrial ecosystem," he stated.

The project would prove to be a boon for soldiers and generate employment opportunities in Jabalpur and surrounding areas, including for workers, youth, small entrepreneurs and other sections of the local population, Singh said.

CEC Gyanesh Kumar interacts with BLOs, hails them for ground efforts



FAIR REPORT
 ■ Chennai

Describing BLOs as the foundation and backbone of Indian democracy, Chief Election Commissioner of India (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar on Thursday interacted with field-level poll machinery and youth delegates during the ECI's Regional Conference on "ELC & ECINET" held at Kalaivanar Arangam here.

The day-long conference, organised by the ECI in coordination with the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu, focused on grassroots electoral preparedness and voter awareness across Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Interacting with over 500 Booth Level Officers (BLO) from 14 surrounding districts, the CEC commended their dedicated door-to-door verification and on-ground efforts.

"Booth-level officers are the foundation of any democracy. The booth-level officers of Tamil Nadu, as well as all parts of the country, are working booth to booth, house to house to ensure that the electoral rolls and voter lists are correct, cleaned up, and free of mistakes. The Election Commission of India salutes them," the CEC said,

adding that valuable suggestions shared by the officers would be reviewed by the Commission for appropriate action. The session with field functionaries concluded with a vote of thanks by the District Election Officer (DEO), Chennai.

Addressing an afternoon gathering of nearly 1,000 delegates, including first-time voters, students, and educators representing 300 schools, 75 colleges, and 25 universities across 38 districts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, the CEC urged young citizens to champion democratic values, adopt informed voting practices, and actively drive voter literacy through institutional Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs).

Delegates also participated in interactive exhibitions and witnessed live demonstrations covering essential stages of the electoral cycle, including electoral roll preparation, voting procedures, and vote counting.

Earlier, speaking to reporters at the Chennai airport, Kumar congratulated both Tamil Nadu and Puducherry for achieving the highest number of votes polled as well as the highest voting percentages in the recently held Assembly elections.

Need robust Indo-German arbitration mechanism as trade grows: CJI

FAIR REPORT
 ■ New Delhi

Highlighting substantial and growing economic relationship between India and Germany, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Thursday said there is a necessity of having trust in international commerce and a robust arbitration mechanism can build the confident ecosystem.

Speaking at the Indo-German arbitration conclave in Berlin, Germany, CJI Kant pointed out that disputes are a natural feature of commercial activity but their existence does not necessarily indicate a failure of trust. "What matters is whether the legal system provides a reliable mechanism through



which disagreements can be resolved without undermining the commercial relationship itself," he said, adding that an arbitration agreement is more than a procedural clause in a contract which represents a commitment to a method of resolving future disagreements.

"India and Germany share a substantial and growing economic relationship. German investment in India spans important sectors, while Indian companies are increasingly entering the German market. As these relationships become more sophisticated, the con-

tracts that support them also become more complex," he said.

He further said that long-term supply arrangements, infrastructure projects, technology agreements, joint ventures and cross-border investments inevitably raise questions that may not always be resolved through negotiation alone.

CJI Kant pointed out that the arbitral process must be supported by efficient institutions, capable arbitrators and courts that intervene only where it is extremely necessary, without delaying or displacing the arbitral process.

"International commerce depends upon trust at every stage. Businesses must trust

their contractual partners and have confidence in the legal framework. When a dispute arises, they must be confident that there exists an institution capable of resolving it fairly, efficiently and in accordance with law. Arbitration can fulfil this role only when the entire ecosystem surrounding it commands that confidence," CJI Kant said.

He emphasised the need for specialised arbitral institutions, arbitrators, counsel and, equally importantly, the courts that support the arbitral process.

The CJI said institutional trust is not created overnight and is built through consistent practice, professional integrity and sustained engagement.

Raksha Bandhan symbolises feelings respect and mutual care, says President



FAIR REPORT
 ■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday greeted citizens on the eve of Raksha Bandhan, saying the festival symbolises feelings of respect and mutual responsibility not only between brothers and sisters but also among families, friends and society.

"This festival reminds us that every relationship rests on the pillars of trust, sensitivity and mutual cooperation," President Murmu said in a message. The festival of Raksha Bandhan has been an integral part of our culture and tradition since ancient times, she said. "In many 'shlokas' and 'mantras', we find the words 'Rakshe, Ma Chala, Ma Chala'. These words express the imploration, 'May this bond of protection continue forever'," she said.

Raksha Bandhan has become popular as a social festival in which sisters tie a Rakhi on the wrists of their brothers, the president said.

"This symbolises the feelings of warmth, respect and mutual responsibility, not only between brothers and sisters but also among siblings, families, friends and society," she said.



From next April, automatic headlamps in new two-wheelers will work only in passing beam (low beam) mode, and headlamps of cars and other vehicles will have less intense illumination to reduce glare considering that such lights cause visual discomfort or impairs the vision of other road users. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has proposed amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles rules to make it mandatory for automatic headlamps in new two-wheelers to work only in passing beam (low beam) mode.

The move is aimed at reducing glare and improving vision of other road users. The MoRTH, in a draft notification said, "In the principal rules...provided further that, on and after 1st April 2028, the automatic head lamp on operation shall operate in passing beam only," it said.

The amendments in automotive vehicle standards are being made because efforts to persuade drivers and make them aware of the need to use low-beam mode have not yielded desired results.

At present, the Automatic Headlamp On (AHO) system can switch on both low beam and high beam modes depending on vehicle settings. The proposed rule man-

dates that when the automatic system is active, the headlamp will be on low beam.

According to the draft notification, as for high-intensity headlamps, the maximum permissible intensity has been reduced from 1.5 lakh candela or cd (official base unit of luminous intensity) to 1 lakh cd for two-wheelers.

The maximum permissible inten-

sity for four-wheelers (cars) has been reduced from 2.25 lakh cd to 1.5 lakh cd.

It has also been proposed that the mounting height of main-beam headlamps be equivalent to that prescribed for passing-beam headlamps. These measures target one of the major causes of night-time road crashes in India — drivers using headlamps on high beam in urban areas, which can temporarily blind motorists approaching from the opposite direction, reducing visibility and increasing the risk of crashes.

In another safety measure, buses and other heavy vehicles could be required to use genuine reflective tapes. The aim is to make such vehicles more visible to motorists during nighttime driving and periods of poor weather.

If implemented, the proposals would mark a significant tightening of vehicle lighting standards with road safety and glare reduction as key objectives.

125 Kg Suspected Adulterated Milk Cake Destroyed in Bassi as Food Safety Team Cracks Down on Festive-Era Sweet Shops

FAIR REPORT
 JAIPUR

In a decisive intervention ahead of the festive season, the Jaipur-II food safety team destroyed nearly 125 kg of suspected adulterated milk cake at Sharma Mishthan Bhandar in Bassi, sending a strong warning to sweet manufacturers and retailers attempting to compromise food quality for profit.

The action was carried out under the state's "Shuddh Aahar — Milawat Par Waar" campaign, aimed at intensifying surveillance of food adulteration during the festival season. The operation was conducted on the directions of Additional Chief Secretary Gayatri Rathore and Commissioner, Food Safety and Drug Control, Rajasthan, Avichal Chaturvedi.

Dr Manish Mittal, CMHO Jaipur-II, said the food safety team conducted an intensive

inspection of sweet shops in Bassi's main market. At Sharma Mishthan Bhandar on Tunga Road, officials found milk cake that had reportedly been procured from Alwar at 180 per kg and was being cut and sold across the counter for 360 per kg. The team collected samples and destroyed the suspecting adulterated stock at the premises. The material comprised 60 packets packed in three cartons. Officials said further action under the Food Safety and Standards Act would follow after the laboratory report is received. The inspection did not stop at one establishment. The team collected a sample of milk cake from Shri Ambe Jodhpur Mishthan Bhandar, while samples of milk cake, mawa barfi and gulab jamun were taken from Lal Ji Jodhpur Mishthan Bhandar for laboratory examination.

SEBI mulls scrapping merchant banker rule for small-ticket debt



Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday proposed granting an exemption from mandatory appointment of a merchant banker for small-value debt issued through a private placement basis by listed entities.

The move is aimed at reducing compliance costs and boosting market development.

The current rule requires issuers to appoint at least one merchant banker for private placements of debt securities or non-convertible redeemable preference shares with a face value of ₹10,000.

This increases the cost of capital for issuers, eroding the economic viability of planned issuances, thereby discouraging frequent small-value debt issuances, Sebi said in its consultation paper.

Accordingly, Sebi has proposed to exempt "small-value debt" issues from the requirement to appoint merchant bankers.~ (PTI)

BPCL says no decision to replace E20 with E10

FAIR REPORT
 New Delhi

Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL), India's second largest fuel retailer, on Thursday said there is no decision to replace E20 petrol with E10, clarifying that the current debate is over whether older vehicles should have access to a lower-ethanol blend and how an additional grade of petrol could be supplied across India's vast fuel-distribution network.

In a media call post the company's annual shareholder meeting, BPCL Chairman and Managing Director Sanjay Khanna, however, said he saw no operational or logistical chal-



lenge in switching from E20 petrol to E10 if the government decides to change the ethanol-blending policy. "I never said that E20 will

be changed to E10," he said, adding that it was being debated in some circles whether older vehicles should have an option of

lower-ethanol blend fuel. "That doesn't mean E20 will be out and E10 will be in," he said. His comments come amid a wider policy discussion over whether owners of older vehicles should have access to E10 petrol, which contains 10 per cent ethanol, alongside E20, which contains 20 per cent ethanol. India has progressively increased ethanol blending in petrol as part of efforts to reduce crude oil imports, lower emissions and support domestic ethanol production. Khanna stressed that no decision has been finalised on changing the current fuel-blending regime. "Nothing has been finalised," he said. "But to

answer your question, what if it happens or what are the changes required? I will say nothing because already we established E20. It's only a matter of changing from E20 to E10, or suppose it has to be done. On that account, we don't see as a company any challenge for that matter. None of the oil companies will have a challenge to go from E20 to E10." It is being debated whether India should make E10 petrol, which contains 10 per cent ethanol, available alongside E20 fuel, following concerns raised by some consumers and industry stakeholders about the impact of higher ethanol blends on vehicles and fuel availability.

NABARD, NaBFID sign MoU for funding rural infra projects

FAIR REPORT
 New Delhi

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development and the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development have signed an initial pact to strengthen collaboration in financing infrastructure projects with significant rural impact.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides a framework for joint financing, knowledge sharing and the development of innovative financing solutions, with a focus on expanding



access to long-term, competitively priced finance for projects that can strengthen rural infrastructure and value chains, a joint statement said on Thursday.

GAIL plans major expansion in gas, petrochemicals and clean energy, says chairman

FAIR REPORT
 New Delhi

State-run gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd plans to expand its natural gas pipeline network, diversify LNG sourcing and shipping, scale up petrochemicals and LPG infrastructure, and invest in clean-energy technologies as geopolitical disruptions underscore the need for greater energy security, the company's chairman said on Thursday.

Addressing GAIL's 42nd annual general meeting, Deepak Gupta said the year had highlighted the growing importance of bal-

ancing energy security with the global shift toward cleaner fuels.

"Energy security has become as important as energy transition," he said, pointing to geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and disruptions to LNG supply chains through the Strait of Hormuz that exposed vulnerabilities in global energy markets.

"The resulting volatility in LNG prices, freight rates and supply availability reinforced the need for diversified sourcing, resilient infrastructure and flexible supply chains," he said. "At the same time, the global transition



towards cleaner energy continued unabated, with sustained investments in renewable energy, nuclear power, energy storage and low-carbon technologies."

Natural gas, because of its flexibility and lower

carbon intensity, would continue to play a role in the energy transition, he said.

Gupta said the company's pipeline network, already India's largest natural gas transmission system, has expanded to more than

18,690 kilometres, with another 1,500 km under construction. Once those projects are completed, the network is expected to approach 20,000 km.

GAIL is simultaneously expanding its LPG transmission business. The company is doubling the capacity of its 1,427-km Jamnagar-Loni LPG pipeline to 6.5 MMTPA from 3.25 MMTPA.

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board has also authorised GAIL to develop three LPG pipelines with a combined length of about 1,775 km.

In petrochemicals, GAIL commissioned a 60,000-

tonne-a-year polypropylene unit at Pata, raising the integrated complex's capacity to 870,000 tonnes from 810,000 tonnes.

The company is also progressing with its 500,000-tonne-a-year propane dehydrogenation-polypropylene project at Usar, which Gupta described as India's first PDH-based polypropylene complex. The project entails an estimated investment of about ₹11,256 crore.

At Mangalore, work is progressing on a 1.25 MMTPA purified terephthalic acid (PTA) plant, giving GAIL an entry into another petrochemical value chain.

India's EV market to reach ₹20 lakh crore by 2030: Gadkari

FAIR REPORT
 New Delhi

India's electric vehicle (EV) market is expected to grow to ₹20 lakh crore by 2030, with the potential to create five crore jobs, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Wednesday.

Addressing a summit organised by the CII-ITC Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development, Gadkari said that currently 57 lakh electric vehicles are registered in India, with 7 per cent market penetration.

"India's electric vehicle (EV) market will be worth ₹20 lakh crore by 2030. It will also create five crore jobs by 2030," he said.

The road transport and highways minister highlighted that India's two largest two-wheeler vehicle manu-



facturers, Bajaj Auto and Hero MotoCorp, export more than 50 per cent of vehicles they produce. Gadkari said there is demand for one lakh electric buses annually in India, but "we are able to manufacture only 50,000-60,000 EV buses annually".

He said the government aims to make India's automobile industry number

one in the world within five years. The future of the Indian automobile industry is very good as the country has trained manpower, Gadkari added. "Within five years, our target is to make India's automobile industry the number 1 in the world... it is difficult, but not impossible," the minister said. Gadkari pointed out that

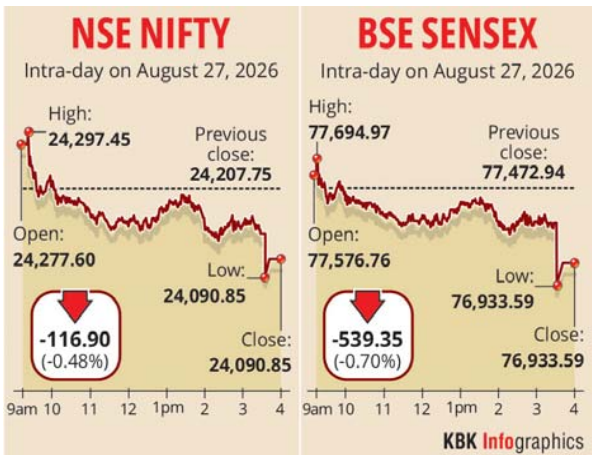
the quality of vehicles manufactured in India is good and the cost is less, so all top automobile companies are present in the country.

"When I took charge as transport minister, the size of the Indian automobile industry was ₹14 lakh crore. The size of the Indian automobile industry is now ₹22 lakh crore," Gadkari said.

Presently, the size of the US automobile industry is ₹78 lakh crore, followed by China (₹47 lakh crore) and India (₹23 lakh crore).

Gadkari noted that India is spending ₹22 lakh crore on importing fossil fuels and because of the import of fossil fuels, "we are facing a problem of pollution".

"We are making good highways. Good roads with alternatives, and bio-fuel is the future," the minister said.



Sensex tanks 539 points, Nifty drops below 24,100 dragged by HDFC Bank

FAIR REPORT
 Mumbai

Stock markets declined for the second consecutive day on Thursday, with the benchmark Sensex dropping by 539 points due to last-minute selling in blue-chip shares such as HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries amid persistent geopolitical uncertainty.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 539.35 points, or 0.70 per cent, to settle at the day's low of 76,933.59 on the monthly derivatives-expiry day. The index traded with a negative bias for most of the day and fell sharply in the last 15 minutes of the session.

Similarly, the 50-share NSE Nifty declined 116.90 points, or 0.48 per cent, to end at the day's low of 24,090.85.

HDFC Bank was the biggest loser among 30 Sensex firms, dropping by 2.08 per cent following news of a US class-action lawsuit. Index heavyweight Reliance Industries fell by 1 per cent, dragging the index down. Bharti Airtel, NTPC, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Tech and ITC were also among major laggards.

Kotak Mahindra Bank, ICICI Bank, Tech Mahindra and Bharat Electronics were among the winners.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, edged higher by 0.67 per cent to \$88.43 per barrel.

"Expiry-led volatility and the lack of a diplomatic breakthrough in the Middle East continue to keep markets range-bound in the near term," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

"Indian equity markets ended lower on Thursday as domestic headwinds outweighed supportive global cues, with broad-based selling across key sectors offsetting the relief from softer crude oil prices and easing concerns over the Strait of Hormuz," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The Nifty remained under pressure through the session as weakness in heavyweight financial stocks and continued selling in PSU banks, FMCG, services and IT weighed on sentiment, he said.

Gold extends slide, falls ₹800 ahead of Rakshabandhan

FAIR REPORT
 New Delhi

Gold prices fell for the second straight session, declining by ₹800 to ₹1,65,700 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday, even as local markets geared up for Rakshabandhan celebrations.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹1,66,500 per 10 grams on Wednesday.

However, silver remained unchanged at ₹2,50,500 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes), according to local traders. The decline in gold comes a day before Rakshabandhan, when consumers traditionally step up purchases of gifts and jewellery. The festival, to be celebrated on Friday, is marked by the exchange of gifts between brothers and sisters, with gold and silver jewellery contributing significantly to festive purchases.

Analysts said gold prices also fell due to a rebound in the US dollar and Treasury bond yields. Spot gold traded lower on Thursday



as a recovery in the US dollar and Treasury yields weighed on the yellow metal following stronger-than-expected US inflation data, Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Gold declined ₹1,400 over the last two

trading sessions, after touching ₹1,67,100 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Akshat Siddhant, Lead Quant Analyst at investment platform Mudrex, said silver remained steady after its initial sell-off in the local markets.

Market participants are also keeping an eye on the US Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh's Jackson Hole speech on Friday, he said.

Analysts said that any signal on the Fed's approach to inflation and interest rates could influence the dollar and Treasury yields, which in turn affect the appeal of assets such as gold.

Globally, spot gold slipped marginally to trade at \$ 4,585.88 per ounce.

Spot gold prices traded lower as the US dollar index firmed up on inflation data, as Fed rate hike probability increased, Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said. Silver, however, showed greater resilience in the overseas markets, rising 0.31 per cent to \$68.32 per ounce.

Rupee falls 11 paise to close at 95.55 against US dollar

FAIR REPORT
 Mumbai

The rupee pared initial gains and settled for the day lower by 11 paise at 95.55 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, on a strong American currency and weak domestic markets.

Forex traders said the broad strength of the American currency in the overseas market negated the support from easing crude oil prices.

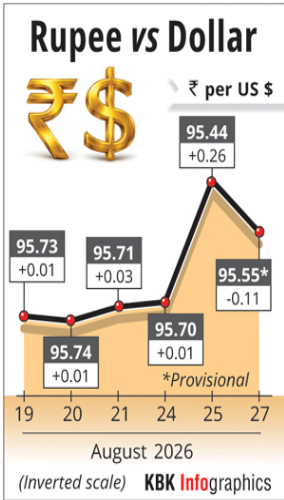
Brent prices fell below the \$90 mark for the first time in several sessions amid continuing discussions between Iran and Oman regarding a

temporary shipping corridor through the Strait.

While no final agreement has been reached, the fact that negotiations are continuing has reduced fears of a prolonged disruption to global oil supplies, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 95.50, then touched an intraday high of 95.40 and a low of 95.56 and finally settled for the day at 95.55 (provisional) against the greenback, lower by 11 paise from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee settled for the day higher by 26 paise at 95.44 against



the US dollar. The Indian foreign exchange market was closed on Wednesday on account of Id-e-Milad.

According to forex traders, market participants will be closely monitoring US Fed Chair Kevin Warsh's speech at the Jackson Hole Symposium.

According to Anindya Banerjee, Head of Commodity and Currency Research, Kotak Securities, the rupee's story this month is really the story of the flows.

"The special swap facility has attracted total inflows of nearly \$73 billion as of August 21, over \$65 billion through

FCNR(B) deposits alone, roughly two-and-a-half times what the celebrated 2013 scheme raised, and with the final rush into the August 31 deposit deadline and the ECB window open until December, we estimate total flows under these schemes could touch \$85 to \$90 billion," Banerjee said.

The inflows have created a formidable war-chest, and it means the rupee's appreciation potential remains largely unspent, he said, adding, "We expect a 95 to 96 operational range, and a close below 95 would open a move towards 94. We remain bullish on the Indian

rupee." Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 99.21, higher by 0.05 per cent.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading higher by 0.61 per cent at \$88.38 per barrel in futures trade.

On the domestic market front, Sensex fell 539.35 points to settle at 76,933.59, while the Nifty dropped 116.90 points to 24,090.85.

Foreign institutional investors purchased equities worth ₹502.63 crore on a net basis on Wednesday, according to exchange data.